DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 523 FL 003 839

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TITLE	The Aspect of Culture through the Teaching of Bahasa Indonesia.
PUB DATE	24 Nov 72
NOTE	10p.; Paper presented at the American Conference of Teachers of Uncommon Asian Languages, Atlanta, Georgia, November 24, 1972
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	College Language Programs; *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Context; *Cultural Education; Form Classes (Languages); *Indonesian; Language Instruction; *Pronouns; Syntax; *Uncommonly Taught Languages

ABSTRACT

The significance of language in the teaching of Indonesian culture is illustrated in a lengthy discussion of pronouns, personal names, and titles. The function of the second person singular pronoun "you" is also examined. Concluding remarks describe the author's personal experience in teaching Indonesian culture and language at the college level. (RL)

ED 071523

THE ASPECT OF CULTURE THROUGH THE TEACHING OF BAHASA INDONESIA

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November 24, 1972

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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FL003 839

This paper is presented to the meeting on "Integrating Culture in Programs for Less Commonly Taught Asian Languages" of the "American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages" in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 24, 1972.

The Aspect of Culture through the Teaching of Bahasa Indonesia

1. Introduction

It is generally agreed that a living language cannot be taught in a vacuum without focussing extensively on the culture of the people who use the language. From my experience in teaching the Indonesian language, I have derived great pleasure in imparting my knowledge of the culture with students of the language.

In this short paper I would like to share with you some of the ways in which the language itself gives clues which help us to understand the culture, and the way I try to use the language to depict both the social and historical dimensions of the culture of the people.

2. How the Language Itself Teaches the Culture

a. Foreign Words

From the very first day of class the students are exposed to the history of Indonesian culture. The first thing I stress with my students is how to address me, namely to use the phrase Pak Guru. The word guru (teacher), derived from the Sanskrit language, is well known among American young people today. Soon they learn about other Indonesian words of Sanskrit origin, such as bahasa (language) and saya (I), and of Chinese origin, as nyonya (madam) and toko (shop); of Persian origin, as jam (clock) and baju (coat); of Tamil origin, as kedai (stall) and macam (sort); of Arab origin, as kabar (news) and pikir (to think); of Portuguese origin, as meja (table) and jendela (win-

dow); of English origin, as botol (bottle) and pensil (pencil); of Dutch origin, as kamar (room) and bioskop (cinema); and of American origin, as silet (razorblade) and mobil (automobile). As the students advance in the study of the Indonesian language, they quickly learn that these words are the result of the influence of foreign cultures and words which diffused within Indonesian culture. It also appears that words are like people; they are born, live for a certain period, become old and finally die a natural death. The indigenous word hulubalang, for example, which depicts a person of high position in government, army and police, is on the verge of dying, and is being replaced by more modern words, like: jenderal (general), letnan kolonel (lieutenant colonel), perwira (officer), polisi (police) and bupati (district officer). Some of the borrowed words are disappearing too, for example the Persian nakhoda (skipper) which is being replaced by the Indo-Germanic kapten (captain).

Students are startled to learn that many English words in their assimilated form are commonly used in the Indonesian language; for example: revolusi (revolution), konfrontasi (confrontation), konstitusi (constitution), demonstrasi (demonstration), industrialisasi (industrialization), and many more. These words represent new ideas which were lacking in the Indonesian culture. Words like listrik (electricity) and telpon (telephone) are borrowed and appear today in a new form fitting the sound patterns of the Indonesian language; others like gas (gas) and motor (motor) are borrowed but retain the original form, though pronunciation is quite different. These new words are enriching the Indonesian language, and therefore, no serious objection should arise in using them.

In addition, there are borrowed words which do not follow native morphological rules. These verbs, usually verbs, do not follow the rule of disposition of the first letter when preceded by the prefix me- to

become an active verb; for example: memparkir (to park) and not memarkir; mentik (to type) and not menik.

b. Personal Names

Another example of how language teaches culture is apparent in the way that personal names applied in the lessons depict the variety of ethnic groups living as one nation in Indonesia. People carrying the names of Wongsonegoro and Djojokusumo are definitely Javanese from Central or East Java; Widjaja and Wiranataatmadja are Sundanese from West Java; Sihombing and Simatupang are Bataks from Northern Sumatra; Sutan Mahmud and Datuk Meringgih are from Central Sumatra; Pereira and Pattipeilohy are from Ambon, etc.

Other names indicate past or present relation to religion. The Javanese Muslim Gatot Subroto and the Menangkabau Muslim Sutan Maharadja both show past relation with Hinduism; the Malay Abu Bakar and the Makasarese Hasanudin indicate Islamic affiliation; the Menadonese Hans B. Jassin and the Javanese Willibrordus S. Rendra show respectively their Protestant and Catholic affiliation.

What is also important, but will be difficult to teach in U.S., is the fact that proper names are associated not only with ethnic group but also with dialects in Bahasa Indonesia, namely Javanese Indonesian, Batak Indonesian, etc.

c. Titles

People with status -- socially as well as religiously -- receive titles or honorific names. These titles are placed before or after the personal names. RADEN ADJENG Kartini and RADEN MAS Soeparto are Javanese titles

and names of a woman and a man of nobility; PUTI or PUTRI Ramlah and SUTAN Alamsjah Bimbing TUANKU PALIMO gelar DATUK RADJO BUDJANG are the titles and names of a Menangkabau woman and man of nobility; BORU Pasaribu and RAJA BONA Nionan are titles and names of a Batak woman and man of nobility; RATU DALAM Dedapan and ANAK AGUNG Made are Balinese; CUT Meuthia and TEUKU Daudsjah are from Aceh.

Some examples of religious titles include: HAJI Sulaiman, KYAI Mansur, and SYEKH Muhammad are Muslim leaders; IDA BAGUS Anom was the name of a Hindu priest in Bali; GURU Hatiabulan is an old name showing the mystical past of a Batak religious leader.

To reinforce the understanding of the meaning or the use of these titles one might want to provide "level-switching" exercises.

d. The Second Singular Personal Pronoun "You"

A significant phenomenon in the Indonesian language is the unstable position of the second singular personal pronoun. Although the words engkau and kamu exist in the language, Indonesians are hesitant to address anyone, whether superior, equal or inferior, with the word "you". Indonesians feel that the word "you" contains an element of disrespect toward the person addressed. This question seems to be related to the fact that status, honor and respect play a very important role in the life of Indonesians and therefore they want to be known by their proper name and/or title. An Indonesian is more than a "you", a singular entity; he belongs to his family, his community, and his position. For example, among the Menangkabau people every young man receives a title when he is married and thereafter he is always addressed with this name. A married Menangkabau woman is often spoken to as Rangkayo which literally means "wealthy person". The respect toward parents by child-

ren is an ancient unwritten law. Parents and older people are not addressed by their own name, but other words showing respect are always used. In some places a parent might be known by the name of his child. For example, Pak Sulaiman would not be named Sulaiman but rather he would be the father of Sulaiman. Government authorities are often spoken to as Bapak or Pak meaning "father", and their wives as Ibu or Bu, "mother". Children also expect to be addressed by their proper name, or sometimes they are called by their position in the family, such as adik (younger brother or sister), kakak (older brother or sister), or abang or bung (older brother). Even a person of the lowest level in the community, bung becak (rickshaw man) expects to be respected by others. To honor those bung becaks who played an important role in the revolution of 1945-1949, President Soekarno elevated the term bung -- which in the mind of some people is integrally related to becak -- by calling himself Bung Karno. In this way he showed the importance of honor and respect in the Indonesian way of life. No one is to be addressed as "you", not even to bung becak.

Modern Indonesians themselves feel awkward in not being able to apply the second singular pronoun in their daily conversations. The Dutch word "jij" and "U" were used during the colonial period and are still used in a few places. The English "you" is now being applied by a few. There is a new word, anda, which was created to try to introduce one universal term for the second singular pronoun, but this seems to have been accepted for use only in advertisements. All these substitutes lead to no real solution to the problem because once they are accepted to mean "you" in a general sense they fall into the same category as the older forms of engkau and kamu, and are regarded in poor taste when used.

At present, tuan (sir) and saudara (brother) are the most acceptable substitute for "you". However, they cannot be used indiscriminately.

In Central and East Java the word tuan reminds one of the colonial era. In Sumatra, on the other hand, tuan is thought to be closely related to Tuanku or Paduka Tuan, or Paduka Tuan Yang Mulia (Your Excellency), titles used to address someone of the highest rank. In Indonesia in general, and in rural Java especially, Pak is more acceptable. In Java's cities the Dutch word "oom" (uncle) is often used. The Hokien Chinese "lu" is only used by the lower class in Jakarta and should be regarded as rather rude and not acceptable at all among educated persons. Javanese, and often Chinese use the second level Javanese word sampeyan which seems to have gained some degree of acceptance in Central and East Java.

The cause of the restricted use of "you" seems to have its origin in the importance given to status, honor, and respect in Indonesian life. Whatever other reasons might exist for avoiding the use of "you" the result is the same, in that the structure of Indonesian syntax is effected and the objective structure is one of the language's most important forms of sentence structure.

e. Connotative Meaning

The colloquial and vernacular phrases that are used in the Indonesian language indicate something about the character of the people. Indonesians are said to be reserved or "on guard". They do not seem to open their real feelings. On the other hand they do not seem to be cold but rather lighthearted and often easy-going. To "keep face" is an important element of Indonesian culture because it could effect the "good-name" of the speaker, his family and his community in which he lives. Hospitality toward strangers and concerns for the well-being of neighbors are other qualities of Indonesian culture. One greets people with Apa kabar? Literally this means "What is the

news?", but depending on the circumstances the question could mean "How are you?" or "What can I do for you?" The first two translations of the phrase is always answered with Baik (good, fine) or Kabar baik (good news, I am fine), regardless of how one is really feeling. An Indonesian would never express bad feelings to anyone unless he is very close. A language mask is utilized by answering that "everything is fine".

Another phrase that tells something about the culture of the Indonesian people is the greeting Sudah makan? (Have you had your meal?). This is usually answered in the affirmative Sudah (I have had my meal). To answer with Belum (not yet) would lead to many consequences. First, it forces the questioner into the circumstance in which he has to supply the other with food, and consequently creating an embarrassing situation if there is no proper food to be offered; secondly, by saying that he has not yet eaten might infer that he was not able to provide himself with food which might jeopardize his standing in the community. On the other hand, if he answers with Sudah (Yes, I have eaten) whether he has or not indicates that he is able to provide himself with food and is not burdening his host, but he also knows that he will be offered something which he may not refuse, since to refuse would mean to refuse rezeki baik (good luck) and would insult his host.

A phrase that is related to this area of food and eating could prove to be very embarrassing to a Westerner. A utterance of great compliment to someone would be to call them gemuk (fat). It is always a fine expression to compliment a man by telling him he has a "fat" wife. In a land where food is scarce and people are physically short and slightly built it is indeed fortunate to be fat which means to them good health and prosperity.

2. How the Language Can Be Used to Teach the Culture

When studying language students are given drills and dialogues -- the latter sometimes accompanied by "acting out the situation" -- which reflect the culture of the people whose language they are studying. This greatly enriches the students' grasp and appreciation of the language and certainly makes some of the tedious work of drilling more enjoyable.

Stories and exercises that tell of the type of weather, something of the geography, of the food that is eaten, the clothes that are worn, the houses that are lived in, and the religious and national holidays, all add important background for understanding the people and their culture as well as learning the language. Dialogues that take place at weddings, births, entering a new home and religious feasts all show the importances that Indonesians place on these events. Stories and exercises that point out large families, familial values, importance of family decisions, and the effects on one incident on the entire family can point out to the students the importance the family plays in Indonesian life and culture.

There are certain expressions that can be used in stories and lesson materials to show aspects of adat (tradition, custom, law) and its spirit of gotong-royong (mutual help), for example: Marilah kita memotong padi Pak Karto (Let us harvest Pak Karto's rice), or Tiap-tiap orang mesti memperbaiki jalan desa (Every one must repair the village road). Using these phrases in a story and explaining their meaning will introduce the spirit of communal living and sharing work that is so much a part of the Indonesian way of life.

3. Conclusion

At the end of their first year of studying Indonesian -- a course that consisted of 120 contact hours in the classroom -- one of my classes was

asked to relate what they knew of the culture of the Indonesian people. I was pleased with their answers. The majority of their statements included geographical data, the way Indonesians spend their time at work and at play; the hard struggle for existence; and the solidarity and compactness of family and community life. The students at the elementary level had learned the language well, but I also learned that much more was needed to be included in the further study of the language to get a better understanding of the culture. As a professional language teacher therefore I feel it is important to place more stress on cultural matter. To accomplish this objective I might suggest the following:

1. to use pictures or slides; if this is properly done it will authomatically teach the cultural meaning of dialogues, phrases and even words;
2. to have regularly scheduled time to teach the cultural aspect of language either at the end of each session or a special session.

This objective and method will definitely make for a better understanding of not only the culture but also the people, and will be a motivating force for the new student who wishes to know more than just the vocabulary and grammar of another language.

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